


ALAN INNES-TAYLOR: POLAR PIONEER

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ALAN INNES-TAYLOR: POLAR PIONEER

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for this opportunity to address you. I wish to talk to you about the polar pioneer, Alan Innes-Taylor, who died last January here in Whitehorse. His lengthy life, spent mostly in the Yukon and Alaska, was closely associated with cold regions science and it is these connections I wish to explore.

Alan Innes-Taylor was born in 1900 at Berkhamstead, England, outside of London. By 1908 his family had moved to Toronto. After a short stint in the Royal Canadian Flying Corps during World War I, Innes-Taylor enlisted in the RCMP in September 1921. As a constable for the next five years, he sledged with dogs after posting to Whitehorse.

He continued dogsledding as a Yukon freighter after leaving the RCMP. While on vacation from mining at Keno Hill in January 1929, Innes-Taylor happened to visit the manager of a steamboat company in Vancouver. The manager suddenly received a telephone call from New York. It was the agent for the Byrd Antarctic Expedition then in Antarctica preparing for the first flight over the South Pole. The agent was urgently asking for fresh sled dogs that could be taken to Antarctica immediately. Many of their original dogs had become debilitated on their passage through the tropics. As Admiral Byrd wrote,

"Without dogs we were hopelessly handicapped. We could not transport our supplies . . . much less undertake . . . exploration."

Innes-Taylor volunteered for the task and his life was changed forever.

Other than seasickness, Innes-Taylor's dogs came through the voyage to New Zealand fine. But the expedition ship, the Eleanor Bolling, nicknamed the "Ever More Rolling," could not weather the seas to Antarctica that season and Innes-Taylor with his sled dogs was stuck in New Zealand until the next year. Disregarding the fear of the Kiwi sheep ranchers, the New Zealand Government gave permission for these ferocious dogs to winter over at Mt. Cook. There on the Tasman Glacier, Innes-Taylor ran his dogs and recorded weather and glacier movement for the Government.

He tried going south again in October, this time on board a Norwegian whaler. One of his dogs had eleven puppies, so Innes-Taylor and the ship's doctor experimented with 50 gallons of blue whale milk as puppy formula. They diluted the rich milk and fed it to five of the puppies who thrived on it. It is the only account of cetacean-canine veterinary science I'm aware of!

On the 29th of November 1929, Byrd made the first flight over the South Pole piloted by Bernt Balchen. Though the expedition dogs on the Ice had recovered, Byrd ordered Innes-Taylor and his dogs to continue south and help in the evacuation of the expedition, which Innes-Taylor did in February 1930.

He returned to Antarctica three years later as chief of field operations for the Second Byrd Antarctic Expedition. It sailed from Boston in October 1933 with 157 sled dogs, some of whom were descendants of dogs used by Shackleton in Antarctica. To keep the dogs healthy, the new Laidlaw-Dunkin distemper vaccine was administered to them and no outbreaks occurred. Only seven dogs were lost on the trip to the Ice, one of whom jumped overboard.

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In January 1934 the expedition arrived at the Bay of Whales on the Ross Ice Shelf. One of the ships to be offloaded was the Bear of Oakland, better known in Alaska as the cutter Bear. Under Innes-Taylor's supervision, all the supplies were transported through the pressure ridges to safe caches inland.

Byrd had an ambitious program for the continued exploration of Antarctica. Part of it was a meteorology study during which he was to live alone for the winter at advance base, 100 miles from the main base. Innes-Taylor with Finn Ronne and two others pioneered the route to advance base, marking depots for the tractor train to follow. They built Byrd's hut and in March, Byrd began his famous solo in which he almost died.

Innes-Taylor's return back to Little America was plagued with low temperatures and high winds. The dogs were dying and several were shot, even though it took ten minutes to thaw out the revolver. The pemmican was found unsuitable and new rations were made that austral winter.

During this time, Innes-Taylor composed Wilsonian memoranda planning the coming field season. There were to be three field parties. The first would run a geophysical survey south across the Ice Shelf and up on to the Polar Plateau. The second would accompany the survey to the foot of the Queen Maud Mountains and then branch east into the peaks to study geology. The third would also study geology, but in the unexplored Edsel Ford Mountains of Marie Byrd Land to the northeast of Little America.

As logistics were thinly stretched, Innes-Taylor recommended that his support party remain at base to provide any emergency assistance. Byrd wrote of this,

"Innes-Taylor, in planning the whole operation, had modestly assigned himself an inconspicuous role. Now these men came forward, volunteering, for the good of the whole operation, to eliminate themselves. I should rather find such bigness in my associates than discover a mountain range."

By late December 1934 all the field parties had returned from successful field programs. The Marie Byrd Land party under Siple had made the first scientific reconnaissance of a land discovered from aircraft. The Plateau Party under Morgan and Bramhall had introduced the use of seismics for determining ice thickness. The expedition had also accomplished the first high altitude polar meteorological observations; made the farthest south meteor and cosmic ray observations; and discovered by air the Rockefeller Plateau on the southeast edge of the Ross Ice Shelf, helping to disprove the existence of an hypothetical strait between the Wedell and Ross Seas.

On his return to the U.S., Innes-Taylor went to work for the Animal Division of the Lederle Laboratories. He assisted Dr. Eagles of Duke University in the study of the deadly eastern strain of equine encephalitis by collecting the brains of dying horses and mules. Eventually a chick embryo vaccine was developed.

At the start of World War II, Innes-Taylor was commissioned by Special Act of Congress a captain in the U.S. Army Air Force. During the war he trained arctic and mountain troops in Colorado and Canada. In this work he became associated with Vihjalmur Stefansson; Sir Hubert Wilkins; Paul-Emile Victor, the founder of Expeditions Polaires Francaises; with Frank Smythe, England's famous Himalayan mountaineer; and Belmore Browne, Alaskan explorer and artist.

Before the war, respected Antarctic biologist Carl Eklund had become interested in beaver farming. He had designed pens with flowing water in which the beavers would live on trees cut from surrounding timberland. The beaver rancher would sell the debarked timber for fenceposts and pulpwood, and

the beaver for breeding stock and research purposes. Innes-Taylor tried this scheme in 1946 by leasing 1200 acres near Entrance, Alberta, just north of Jasper. He remarked to the Montreal Gazette,

"We hope to provide live beavers to governments and organizations which might require them for reestablishment of watersheds and zoos."

Design problems and strapped finances ended two years later this experiment in wildlife management and conservation.

Innes-Taylor next became executive officer at Isachsen Land, latitude 78°N, in the Canadian Arctic. Isachsen was part of Operation Arctops, a joint American-Canadian arctic meteorology project headed by Dr. Charles Hubbard of the U.S. Weather Bureau to provide weather reports from the strategic high arctic. Innes-Taylor spent almost a year at this station which had been visited only once before--by Stefansson thirty years earlier. The seven men were inaccessible during the summer; Hubbard referred to Isachsen as "a place of character." In addition to supervising daily met observations, Innes-Taylor banded birds and observed tidal and sea ice fluctuations.

In 1950 he was recalled as a lieutenant-colonel in the U.S. Air Force to command survival training schools for Korean War flight crews. This work brought him to Ladd Air Force Base, now Ft. Wainwright, in Fairbanks, where he became in October 1953 a researcher in charge of the Environmental Protection Section of the Air Force's Arctic Aeromedical Lab. His section conducted R&D into the techniques and equipment for cold weather survival. Innes-Taylor also advised physiologists and biochemists making new survival rations, participating in their field trials. From a suggestion of his came microclimatic studies of the snow-ground interface which led to the development of snowmound shelters at ground-level.

Though self-educated, Innes-Taylor understood the difficulties of applied research. He valued new scientific techniques and encouraged new people in their application. He was especially helpful in pointing out unforeseen problems. As one biologist from this period has remarked, Innes-Taylor was an inspiration in the practical solution of problems.

Innes-Taylor retired to the bush to lead Yukon River float trips, ahead of his time with the conservation and ecology he taught on them. His concern for preservation extended to human events, too, for he was instrumental in saving the Dawson archives flooded in 1966.

During these years he advocated an integrated arctic science policy. In 1961 Innes-Taylor wrote,

"It would appear there should be an overall plan for scientific investigation of the Arctic . . . let's have a plan and let us have people trained to live in the Arctic . . ."

Sound advice from a seasoned pioneer.
Thank you.

This project was supported by AEIDC/UAF, the Alaska Humanities Forum, the Arctic Institute of North America, and the Innes-Taylor family.

the answer for these and research purposes. James Taylor tried this scheme in 1946 by leaving 1500 acres near Fairbanks, Alaska, just north of Fairbanks. He turned it over to the National Geographic Society.

"We hope to provide live beavers to governments and organizations which might require them for scientific or other purposes."

Design problems and financial problems were two other major obstacles in wildlife management and conservation.

James Taylor next became executive officer of Fairbanks Game Preserve, in the Canadian Arctic. He was part of Operation Altop, a joint American-Canadian Arctic meteorology project headed by Dr. Charles Hubbard of the U.S. Weather Bureau to provide weather reports from the arctic high arctic. James Taylor spent almost a year at this station which was built and visited only once before--by Stefansson thirty years earlier. The seven men were inaccessible during the summer; Taylor returned to Fairbanks in a plane of character. In addition to supervising daily operations, James Taylor handled birds and observed birds and sea ice fluctuations.

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Some advice from a seasoned planner.

Thank you.

This project was supported by AFMCPDAR, the Alaska Humanities Forum, the Arctic Institute of North America, and the James Taylor Family.

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